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ABSTRACT

The study undertaken by the Secretariat on the production and distribution of Unesco's Publications is reported. The study also contains the practical measures the Secretariat proposes to take, under the Draft Programme and Budget for 1973-1974 and the Medium-Term Outline Plan, to apply "a publishing policy [corresponding] more closely to the general principles of book production and distribution." (Author/NH)

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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

EXECUTIVE BOARD

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Eighty-ninth Session

89 EX/8
PARIS, 15 May 1972
Translated from the French

Item 3.4 of the Provisional Agenda

DISSEMINATION OF UNESCO'S PUBLICATIONS

SUMMARY

In pursuance of resolution 11 adopted by the General Conference at its sixteenth session, the Director-General submits to the Executive Board the results of the study undertaken by the Secretariat, with the aid of consultants on the production and distribution of Unesco's publications. He also submits to the Executive Board the practical measures he proposes to take, under the Draft Programme and Budget for 1973-1974 and the Medium-Term Outline Plan, to apply "a publishing policy /corresponding/ more closely to the general principles of book production and distribution".

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A. THE STUDY

1. The General Conference, at its sixteenth session, adopted the following resolution:

"11. The General Conference,

Recognizing the importance of Unesco's publications in extending the influence of the Organization,

Acknowledging the high quality of a large number of these publications,

Considering that it is of primary importance that such publications genuinely meet the needs of the circles concerned and that their public should be as wide as possible,

Considering that the dissemination of these publications could be improved by a publishing policy which corresponded more closely to the general principles of book production and distribution,

Invites the Director-General, in consultation with the Executive Board, to make a comprehensive study of this problem and to submit to the General Conference at its seventeenth session specific proposals for action to achieve the objectives defined above".

2. The Director-General submitted to the Executive Board, at its 87th session, proposals concerning the scope of that study and the method to be followed in carrying it out, and he proposed that it be undertaken with the aid of consultants who should be "eminent specialists selected on the strength of the positions of responsibility they occupy at the head of major publishing houses having publications programmes similar to those of Unesco, or on the basis of their knowledge of problems of international publishing" (document 87 EX/5, dated 26 March 1971). The Executive Board approved "the proposals submitted by the Director-General regarding the method to be followed in carrying out the study on the production and distribution of Unesco publications and, in general, his proposals concerning the scope of this study" (87 EX/Decisions, 3.4).

3. The Director-General consequently called on the services of the following three eminent people: Mr. Philip Chester (United Kingdom), Deputy Publisher, Oxford University Press; Mr. Philippe Garcin (France), Managing Director of the Presses Universitaires de France; and Mr. José Ortega Spottorno (Spain), Managing Director of Revista de Occidente and Alianza Editorial. These consultants met at Unesco House from 14 to 18 June 1971 and submitted the report annexed to this document to the Director-General on 7 July.

4. The report and recommendations of the consultants were thoroughly examined by the Secretariat. In the light of the consultants' report and this examination, the Director-General decided to propose the following measures.

B. PROPOSED MEASURES

Separation of activities relating to publications from those concerned with documents

5. These different tasks have hitherto devolved upon the Bureau of Documents and Publications. For the sake of greater efficiency, it is proposed to divide this Bureau into two separate units: one - the Office of Publications - will be responsible for all the activities related to publications under the programme and designed mainly to make an impact outside Unesco, whilst the other - the Bureau of Translations and Documents - will undertake the work connected more specifically with the internal functioning of the Organization. Paragraphs 7006 to 7016 and 7502-7503 of document 17 C/5 give particulars of the respective duties of these two units, which it will be possible to establish without any increase in staff or budgetary resources (1).

Rôle of the Office of Publications

6. The Office of Publications will have a triple function to fulfil, that of (a) a publishing house (Unesco publications or co-publications intended for sale); (b) a literary agent (manuscripts for publication by other publishing firms or material for editing and publication by such firms); and (c) a "governmental" publishing service (official publications and publications for free distribution).

7. For these purposes, the Office will take an active part in the planning and preparation of publication projects. It will examine manuscripts with the aid, if need be, of internal or external consultants. The Director of the Office of Publications will decide, after consultation with the sector or sectors concerned, whether or not to publish and, in the affirmative, choose the best method and procedure for publication.

8. On questions relating to medium and short-term programme planning and execution, the Director of the Office of Publications will consult an Advisory Committee on Publications in which the four programme sectors will be represented.

General publications policy

9. Questions concerning general publications policy will be submitted to a Publications Council presided over by the Deputy Director-General and composed of the Assistant Directors-General and the Director of the Office of Publications. The Council may also give consideration, on an ad hoc basis, to problems submitted to it by the programme sectors or the Office of Publications.

C. ADDITIONAL STUDIES

Regional decentralization of the dissemination of publications

10. It is proposed to initiate a pilot project in Asia during the 1973-1974 biennium designed to expand promotion and sales in that region with a view to increasing the impact of Unesco's publications, more especially in the developing countries. Depending on the results secured, this experiment may subsequently be extended to other regions.

(1) See also Introduction, paragraph 86.

A semi-autonomous "university-type" press

11. A feasibility study will be carried out in 1973-1974 concerning the possible establishment of a semi-autonomous university-type press.

Unesco Courier Book Club and "Unesco Courier" for the young

12. Feasibility studies will also be carried out in the next biennium concerning the formation of a Unesco Courier Book Club and the possible launching of a "Unesco Courier" for the young.

DRAFT RESOLUTION

"The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 89 EX/8,

2. Considers that the proposals submitted by the Director-General are likely to assist in attaining the objectives of resolution 11 adopted by the General Conference at its sixteenth session;

3. Recommends that the General Conference approve these proposals".

ANNEX

7 July 1971

Sir,

Please find herewith the report you requested from us on Unesco's publishing activities.

We greatly regretted that circumstances prevented us from meeting you while we were at Unesco House. However, we were very glad to be received by Mr. Fobes and to have the opportunity of outlining our recommendations to him orally.

Should you so wish, one of us could provide you, in person, with any additional clarification you may require.

Please accept, Sir, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Philip Chester
Deputy Publisher
Oxford University Press

Philippe Garcin
Directeur général
Presses universitaires de France

José Ortega
Directeur général des Editions "Revista de Occidente" et "Alianza Editorial"

CONSULTANTS' REPORT ON THE ORGANIZATION'S PUBLISHING ACTIVITIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Having been asked by Unesco to examine its publishing activities and policy, we met at the Organization's Headquarters from 14 to 18 June 1971.

We consulted one member and one alternate member of the Executive Board as well as 54 officials of the Organization and we visited all the departments of the Bureau of Documents and Publications.

After looking round and interviewing for only five days, the longest period which our professional obligations would permit, there was no possibility of our replying in detail to a list of questions which would have needed several weeks of inquiries, discussions and reflection by a large working party with plenty of time at its disposal.

2. Our terms of reference were very clearly defined by document 87 EX/5 and by the report of the Programme Commission of the Executive Board.

> As Unesco's publications are planned in relation to the needs of the Programme, could the Organization's publishing activities be made to correspond "more closely to the general principles of book production and book distribution"?
>
> If so, how should the preparation and implementation of the publications programme be planned so as to ensure the suitability of the publications to the Organization's aims while at the same time maintaining high standards of quality?
>
> Bearing in mind what has been said above, by what methods could the distribution of publications be organized so as to justify the efforts made in their production: in other words, how could the widest possible readership for each class of publication be reached?

II. BASIC PROBLEMS

3. The comparison which we were asked to make between Unesco's activities and those of strictly commercial publishers seemed to us a difficult one to make. On the other hand, the comparison with the aims and management of "organizations not run on a purely commercial basis" (university publishers and presses, official publishing services, scientific foundations, etc.) was obviously more logical and it was this that we concerned ourselves with especially. It needs to be emphasized, however, that the systematic production of publications in several languages presents Unesco with extra difficulties such as the problems of translation, or adaptation to various cultural traditions; the problems of publishing books acceptable to the various national markets; production problems arising from the versions in different languages and the need to print in various countries; and finally, the problems of selling throughout the world. Unesco unites the advantages and the disadvantages of a high powered administration, which is also intergovernmental, and of a large publishing house which is also multilingual.

The conclusions we reached after long consultations at least make it possible to say that, without any great increase in its present staff and equipment, but provided that certain procedures are revised, Unesco should be able to turn its wealth of talent and experience to good account to achieve the maximum efficiency (and with that, the maximum profitability) of its publishing activities.

4. In our opinion, it is difficult or dangerous to engage in publishing without having a publisher in the full sense of the word, which is the present position when the Bureau of Documents and Publications (whose composition, organization and drive seemed to us exemplary) is responsible for printing and marketing products over which it has no more than superficial control.

What we tried to ascertain was whether, by the development of certain activities of the Bureau of Documents and Publications, it would be possible to achieve as close a resemblance as possible, in its functions and activities, with those of a university-type publishing house.

In this respect, we had the encouraging feeling that there is in all the units of the Bureau of Documents and Publications a well-developed publishing sense. During our talks with those responsible for the various programme sectors, we also saw that there was a desire on their part to extend the circulation of publications to as wide a circle of readers as possible.

With an annual production of 150 titles, some of which, by their subject or presentation, would have satisfactory sales with any specialized publisher, and with sales at published price reaching nearly two million dollars per year, Unesco, in our opinion, can be ranked as a medium-sized publishing house.

III. PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PUBLICATIONS' PROGRAMME, DISTRIBUTION

5. We were less concerned by the complexity of procedures (which are practically the same as those in any large traditional publishing house) than by structural rigidity. We particularly noted a dissipation of effort and an obvious failure of communication (and hence of real understanding) between the different teams engaged in the preparation, production and distribution of Unesco's books and periodicals.

6. Increasing the number of theoretical controls often has the effect of blurring the lines of responsibility. We observed that certain publications, unworthy of being circulated under Unesco's imprint for reasons either of content or of form, found their way into print simply by the sheer force of inertia at various levels and particularly at the stage of acceptance of manuscripts. This means that in spite of their great relevance, recommendations such as the "Notes for a Manual on Book Publication by Unesco" (December 1970) may have little influence on those for whom they are intended unless they are commented on, in connexion with specific cases, at meetings of "editors" (sectors) and "publishers" (DP).

In this connexion, since the programme specialists all think that the printing operations take too long, it may be pointed out that American University Presses consider that the careful rereading of a manuscript by experts, its casting off,

and the subsequent commercial calculations (working out the selling price, market research, etc.) require, all told, at least six to eight weeks, and that it is only after this that the processes of manufacture and of the launching of a sales campaign begin, usually taking more than a year. The figures quoted above seem to us, if anything, to be on the conservative side.

7. Unesco's financial regulations compel the Secretariat to obligate the amounts approved for books (like anything else) before the end of the biennial budgetary period. This system seemed to us to have two disadvantages. On the technical side, it causes considerable overloading of work at the end of the period both on the programme sectors and on the Bureau of Documents and Publications. As regards the intrinsic value of the manuscripts and their adaptation to readers' needs, this strict time schedule seemed a bad thing because it often leads to sacrificing quality in order that the funds available shall not be lost. This pressure is scarcely compatible with the conditions of intellectual work which is always dependent on the progress of research and on the time which authors have available, especially when they are front-rank personalities.

8. It was very clear that Unesco does not discriminate between what a French biologist once very aptly called "long-lived documents" (worthy of the distinction of traditional printing) and "short-lived documents", although in research laboratories all over the world, the procedure of "abstracts" or "pre-prints" is being increasingly developed, with all its attendant advantages of speed and economy.

9. To take one example among many of the lack of communication between programme sectors and DP, the criticism is frequently heard that Unesco publications are not to be found in bookshops or even with its nominated agents throughout the world. This dissatisfaction with the existing distribution service was expressed by several sectors. In our opinion, disappointment of this sort is due to insufficient knowledge of the problems involved (all publishers everywhere have the same criticism levelled at them and it invariably arises from ignorance of how book distribution takes place). Distribution is a purely commercial undertaking requiring the investment of a bookseller's or an agent's own capital. Such investment will therefore be made only to the extent that the distributor expects it to be profitable. He will not willingly carry stock of, or display in his window, or give shelf-room to, books with a slow sale because they tie up his capital for too long. As a rule he can only be persuaded to carry a substantial percentage of any publisher's complete list if it contains a sufficiently high proportion of "best sellers" to offset the unprofitable books. The intellectual quality of a book will not, by itself, ensure its sale; and unless an agent's professional knowledge of his market and a special sales promotion effort have persuaded him that he can find customers for Unesco publications, even the best distributor will not be ready to stock them, especially when they cover (as is the case with Unesco) a large variety of subjects, each one represented by a small number of titles.

Of course some agents are less enterprising and enthusiastic than others, but any summary condemnation of the present distribution system seems to us to be unjustified. The only more effective alternative would be for Unesco to be its own distributor. This solution would, however, require vastly increased expenditure and would raise a variety of other problems (e.g. stock control on a worldwide basis). We cannot believe that the additional costs would result in sufficiently increased sales. We therefore think that Unesco probably has the best distributive method and network it can afford.

10. Promotional activities and advertising for Unesco publications seemed to us similar in every way to those of publishing houses of similar size with the same market in view: preparation and adequate distribution of material (catalogues, folders, lists of new publications), regular information for sales agents and encouragement of their activities, and press services to specialist periodicals. The nature of Unesco's publications scarcely lends itself to press advertising which, as everyone knows, is very expensive and offers frequently uncertain returns. This method has been used in book trade journals, however.

In addition, there is a very clear effort being made to develop contacts with private publishing, either through joint publishing arrangements or by ensuring the optimum use of material by way of translations or cheap editions.

11. The method of calculating sales prices did not always seem to us very logical. This arises from the fact that the financing of each publication is considered on its merits and that policies vary from one programme sector to another. In certain cases, the sectors insist on having a very low sale price and are ready to lay out adequate sums from their budget to achieve this. In other cases, the financial participation of the sectors is cut down to the minimum which, if the publication is worth it, calls for large investments from the Publications Fund that have to be recovered from sales. This obviously leads to the fixing of a higher sales price.

In the first case, publishing houses might consider Unesco prices as unfair competition whilst, in the second, sales may possibly be made more difficult.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

12. It would be advisable in the first place to ask whether books should always closely reflect programme activities or should use a less restricted approach in order to reach a wider readership (while still serving Unesco's aims). This is a problem we are not required to study but which, in our opinion, ought to receive the attention of the competent authorities within the Organization.

13. Having considered the present situation, we think it vital to set up an overall body to be responsible for publications (called here, provisionally, the "Publications Council").

The novel feature of this "Publications Council" would be to bring together for the first time, as a body, the various parties collaborating in the planning, manufacture and distribution of books.

14. The "Publications Council" might bring together, with equal rights to speak and vote, the people delegated by those in charge of the sectors (the presence of the heads of publication units would be necessary on all occasions and possibly the presence of the heads of administrative units), as well as Directors of Division and/or chiefs of section in the Bureau of Documents and Publications.

The Chairman of the "Publications Council" would be the Director of the Bureau of Documents and Publications, considered as the publisher.

15. Since this Council, on which the parties concerned would have equal representation, would both take publishing decisions and be responsible for their implementation (it might also include, in a consultative capacity representatives

of outside bodies, such as private or public research institutions, and professional bookmen), it would assume reorganized and broadened, most of the functions hitherto devolving on the Publications Board, the Chief Editor and the Bureau of Documents and Publications (whose rôle does not appear to be exactly what it would be in the private sector). The Council should not constitute a new administration, but without any marked increase in posts or funds, should take on the real job of publishing which has hitherto been divided between various, insufficiently co-ordinated authorities. The Council would seek to define the sectors' publications policy, establish selective production criteria, stimulate preparatory surveys, follow the programming of research, pointing out needs and shortcomings which might come to light in the course of the execution of the programme and even, if contemporary trends in science so dictated, challenge certain items of investment as the work proceeded. In this way, it would be possible to avoid on the one hand, the feeling of "neglect" experienced so frequently by programme specialists, who often wish to play a greater part in the technical preparation and the launching of their productions, and, on the other, the variety of supervisory procedures interfering with the management of the present Bureau of Documents and Publications.

The Council would decide on the ultimate suitability of a manuscript for promoting the humanitarian and peaceful aims of the Organization, on its intrinsic value and its originality, and on its absolute or relative suitability in terms of the economic conditions of a cultural market clearly defined in advance. The Council should also have the secondary responsibility of sorting out from the mass of work submitted to it those worthy of printing as a book and those which could be reproduced by an economical method such as roneotyping, offset, etc.

Being thus a nerve-centre whose function would be to tap supplies of energy and creativeness too often employed in fragmentary tasks, the Council would function as a registry or arbitration tribunal, according to need, whereas at the moment, everyone feels helplessly abandoned to the administrative assembly line.

16. With this possibility in mind, the heads of publication units, freed from an undue burden of administrative duties, should be given increased powers, and hence increased responsibilities, with regard to editing.

17. The functions devolving on the Publications Council would imply financial autonomy within certain limits. Each sector's budget, approved by the General Conference, would include a fixed allocation for Publications, without the possibility of diverting from it any sum for any other of the sector's activities. Before the end of the budgetary period and at a date to be decided at the discretion of the Director-General, the amount remaining unspent would be credited to the account of the Publications Council, which would then be free either to allot it to the publications budget of another programme sector in deficit, provided that it had manuscripts of suitable quality, or to use it for the promotion or advertising of all or part of the publications which it administers. In this way, without undermining the principle of budgeting by sectors, it would be possible to overcome that lack of flexibility in the system which results (particularly through the application of the rule concerning manuscripts which are time-barred) in agitation at the end of each biennium.

18. As Unesco's image, is, at the present time, less well-defined in the mind of the public at large than the image of this or that scientific or cultural publisher, it seems to us desirable to offset the further centralization of decision-making (resulting from the possible establishment of the Publications Council) by decentralizing the means of action. An improvement in the quality of manuscripts could make more frequent recourse to joint publishing at national or international

level possible in many cases, provided that the nature of the publication permitted this. It could also make it possible, in a subject like education, for example, at least to reach the educational "consumers" more quickly (parents, teachers, subscribers to magazines, etc.) who are usually influenced by international organizations rather tardily, even if it made no difference to the Organization's chosen readership, the educational "workers" (institutions, libraries, etc.). In this case, private-sector publishing would provide extra assistance, making available to Unesco the resources of its own internal consultants (readers, subeditors, etc.). Such collaboration would imply at the very least that Unesco was willing to view some of its publications in the light of the market place and to accept the obligations which this entails.

19. We examined a selection of recent Unesco publications. We think that their distribution could be made easier if they were grouped according to the readership for which they are intended and according to their sale price. Bearing these two points in mind, it would be advisable to introduce as many interdisciplinary collections of books as possible. Leaving aside the obvious commercial advantages to be derived from such a system, it would certainly contribute to establishing Unesco's image as a publisher. A detailed study would have to be made in order to be able to say with accuracy what these collections should be. Some headings, however, suggest themselves immediately:

(1) major programme studies;
(2) textbooks;
(3) directories and works of reference;
(4) statistical and technical studies;
(5) paperbacks.

The paperbacks would be for a wide public and would deal with problems likely to interest readers with an average level of culture, and they would allow Unesco and its activities to become better known. There have already been some publications of this type, for example: Exploring the Ocean and An Introduction to Life-long Education. We suggest that, in the future, writers from outside the Unesco Secretariat should be widely called upon for such works.

The main chapters from certain "major programme studies" (category (1) above) could, if suitable, be republished in paperback form, as has already been done, at the instance of the Bureau of Documents and Publications, for certain sections of the study on Main Trends of Research in the Social and Human Sciences. Long-term planning and market research would be necessary to decide on and to prepare this range of books. Consultation and collaboration with specialized publishers would be profitable from this point of view.

20. Where periodicals are concerned, topicality must be the first consideration more than anywhere else, and articles should be commissioned, written and published in the shortest possible time.

Our inquiry leads us to believe either that there are insufficient staff or that the periodicals staff are distracted from their main work by other tasks. The editor-in-chief of each magazine should be able to give all his time to his work and be freed as far as possible from administrative tasks. It would be a good idea for each magazine to publish systematically brief notices of books brought out by Unesco on topics relating to its subject.

21. We think that the distribution system could be made more effective if the Bureau of Documents and Publications, whose responsibility this is, arranged for more frequent inspection of agents in order to keep up their enthusiasm and see to increasing their efficiency. Such checks, organized as they already are, for reasons of economy, on a regional basis, would have the further advantage of increasing the Bureau's knowledge of its markets and of thus acquainting sectors with specific information needs in different parts of the world. Where large-scale distribution is concerned, everything depends in the final analysis on the suitability of the product for its public.

We have three other general observations to make on the subject of agents:

(1) it would be better, wherever this is possible, that the policy of appointing publishers rather than booksellers be continued;

(2) with notable exceptions, governmental or quasi-governmental organizations show less enthusiasm for Unesco books than entirely commercial publisher agents;

(3) Unesco National Commissions should themselves play a larger part in supporting Unesco agents, particularly by encouraging translations into languages other than the official languages; this should be done on a commericial basis, calling for as little financial contribution as possible on the part of Unesco.

In general, we are of the opinion that the price of Unesco publications could, if necessary, be slightly lower than that which an ordinary publishing house would set.

In developing countries, a contributory factor in widespread distribution is cheapness. Books which are required in large quantities in the poorer countries of the world must be subsidized - either, perhaps, out of a special grant set up for this purpose, or by overpricing in the industrially-advanced countries. The policy recently adopted by DP for this purpose should be continued and extended.

22. Advertisements in quality newspapers on an international scale could be more frequent not in the hope of better sales for this or that publication but to assert Unesco's "brand image" as a publisher in the eyes of the public. If this idea is accepted, fairly large special funds would have to be set aside for the purpose since such advertising would not immediately produce returns, and advertising space would have to be taken in the papers of a large number of countries.

Concerning publications destined for a fairly wide public, the link with the Communication Sector ought perhaps to be strengthened - for example, by considering the production of short television films which could be shown on the official networks of each country, through the influence of the National Commissions.

23. Lastly, we think that the publication of books largely for free distribution (category B), compromises the sale of the rest of the printing, and that it would be advisable to reduce to the minimum this type of publication and, in any case, the number of copies distributed free. Another solution would be to issue as a

document and not as a book any publication intended chiefly for free distribution and, in that case, to agree to distribute the whole issue free of charge to well-defined categories of users.

Philip Chester
Deputy Publisher
Oxford University Press

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